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Fitness and Diet Books: A Healthy Market Share
Health Fair Bookstores: What the Doctor Ordered
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Publishers Weekly

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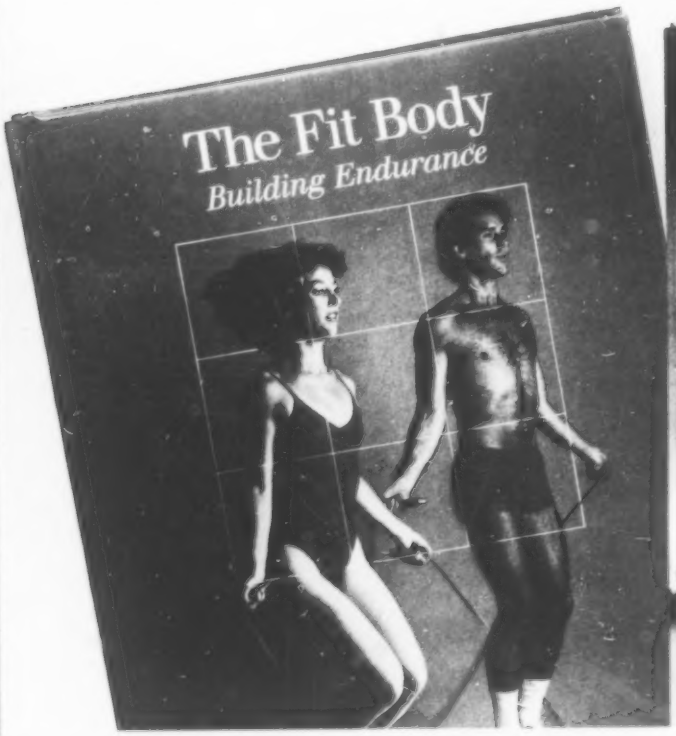

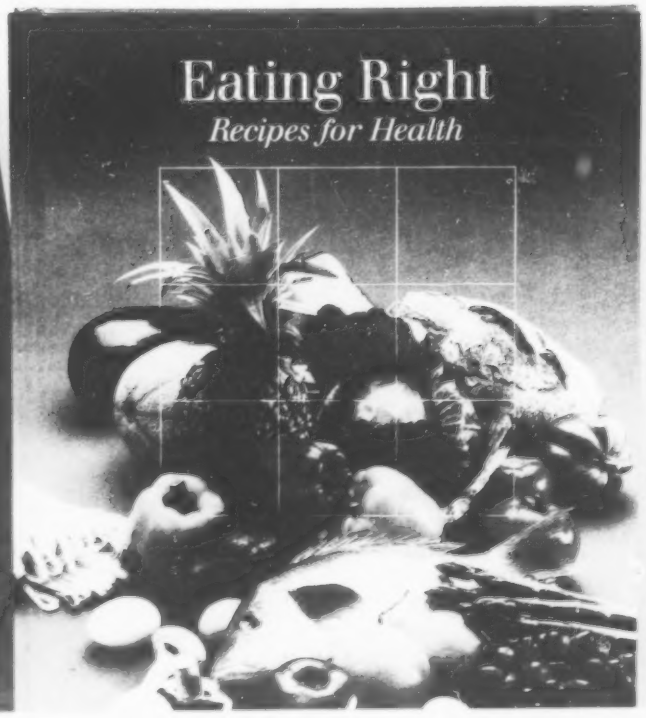

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BY LEONARD WOOD

Fitness Book Purchasers

A casual glance at the television or newsstand would suggest that over the past few years Americans have become fitness fanatics. Innumerable gurus of good health offer alternatives to the fountain of youth, ranging from miracle-diet regimens to invigorating exercise plans, and record numbers of Americans have followed advice to shape up and trim down. In fact, a 1986 Gallup Poll found that a majority of Americans (51%) regularly perform some activity to keep physically fit.

Concurrent with the growing interest in health and fitness has been the increasing sale of books on the subject of health, diet or exercise. Gallup surveys during 1987 revealed that health/diet/exercise titles represented 9% of the nonfiction books purchased, and this proportion is the highest recorded since studies began in 1984. (In 1984 and 1985, it was 7%; in 1986, 6%.)

The profile of the health/diet/exercise book buyer varies somewhat from that of the average book buyer. Both groups tend to be women, but the proportion is greater among fitness book buyers (66%) than among book buyers overall (56%) (TABLE 1).

Whereas the greatest concentration of all book buyers is among 35–49 year olds (31%), the largest share of health/diet/exercise buyers comprises adults age 50 and older (35%).

With respect to socioeconomic status, the distribution of fitness purchasers on such factors as education, income and women's employment suggests that books on health-related topics may have broader appeal than the average volume. Although both consumer populations are composed primarily of the college-educated, those with an annual household income of at least $30,000 and employed women, the representation of these groups is smaller among fitness buyers than among average book purchasers, while the proportion of those in the lower socioeconomic groups is higher than average.

The majority of all books are purchased in a bookstore (55%), but the probability is somewhat lower if the book addresses health, diet or exercise (45%). Fitness books, however, are more likely than the average volume to be purchased in a department or discount store (13%), supermarket (12%) or by mail order (12%) (TABLE 2).

With respect to price, paperback fitness books ($6.50) bear a price tag higher than that on the average book ($5.60), but the hardcover versions ($15.70) tend to be somewhat less expensive than average ($16.70). □

TABLE 1

WHO BUYS FITNESS BOOKS?

	Total Book Buyers %	Health/Diet Exercise Buyers %
Sex		
Male	44	34
Female	56	66
Age		
18–24 years	16	17
25–34 years	27	25
35–49 years	31	23
50 years and older	25	35
Education		
College	60	49
High school graduate	31	38
Non-high school graduate	8	12
Annual Household Income		
$30,000 and over	46	34
$20,000–$29,999	20	26
$10,000–$19,999	15	18
Under $10,000	6	6
Women's Employment Status		
Full time	48	46
Part time	15	11
Not employed	36	42
Region		
East	26	28
Midwest	24	24
South	26	22
West	24	26

TABLE 2

WHERE FITNESS BOOKS ARE BOUGHT

Where Purchased	Total Books %	Health/Diet Exercise Books %
Bookstore	55	45
Department/ Discount store	9	13
Supermarket/ Grocery store	8	12
Book club	7	7
Mail order other than book club	7	12
Drug store	3	3
Newsstand	1	2
Other	7	4
Don't know	3	2
Total	100	100

NOTE: Results are based on 10,180 telephone interviews conducted among a nationally representative sample of adults, age 18 and older, throughout 1987.